



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

WIDENER



HN SVSU S

THIRTEEN
ABOUT MONARCHS
HANSARD WATT

23493.18.14.100

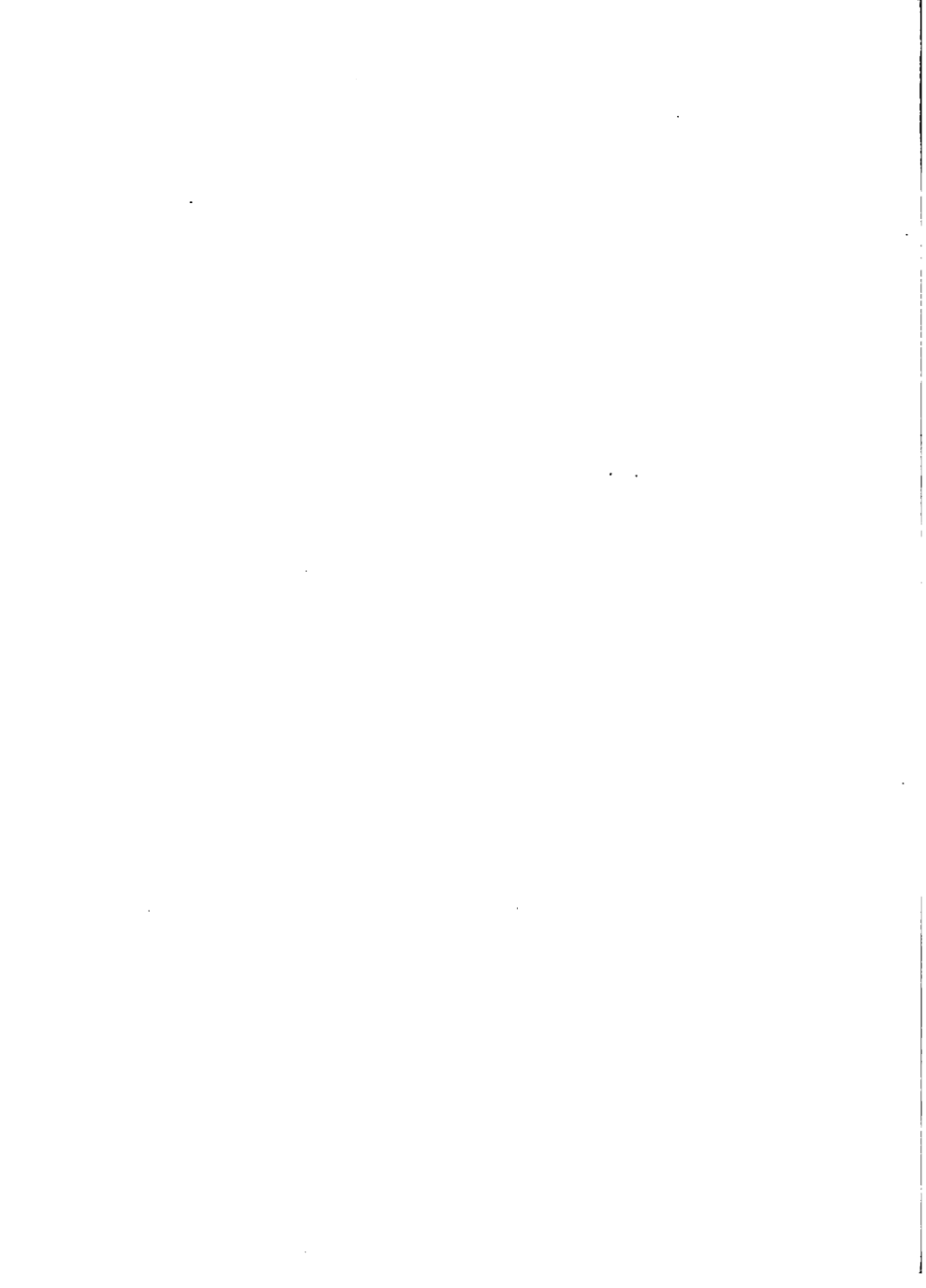
HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY



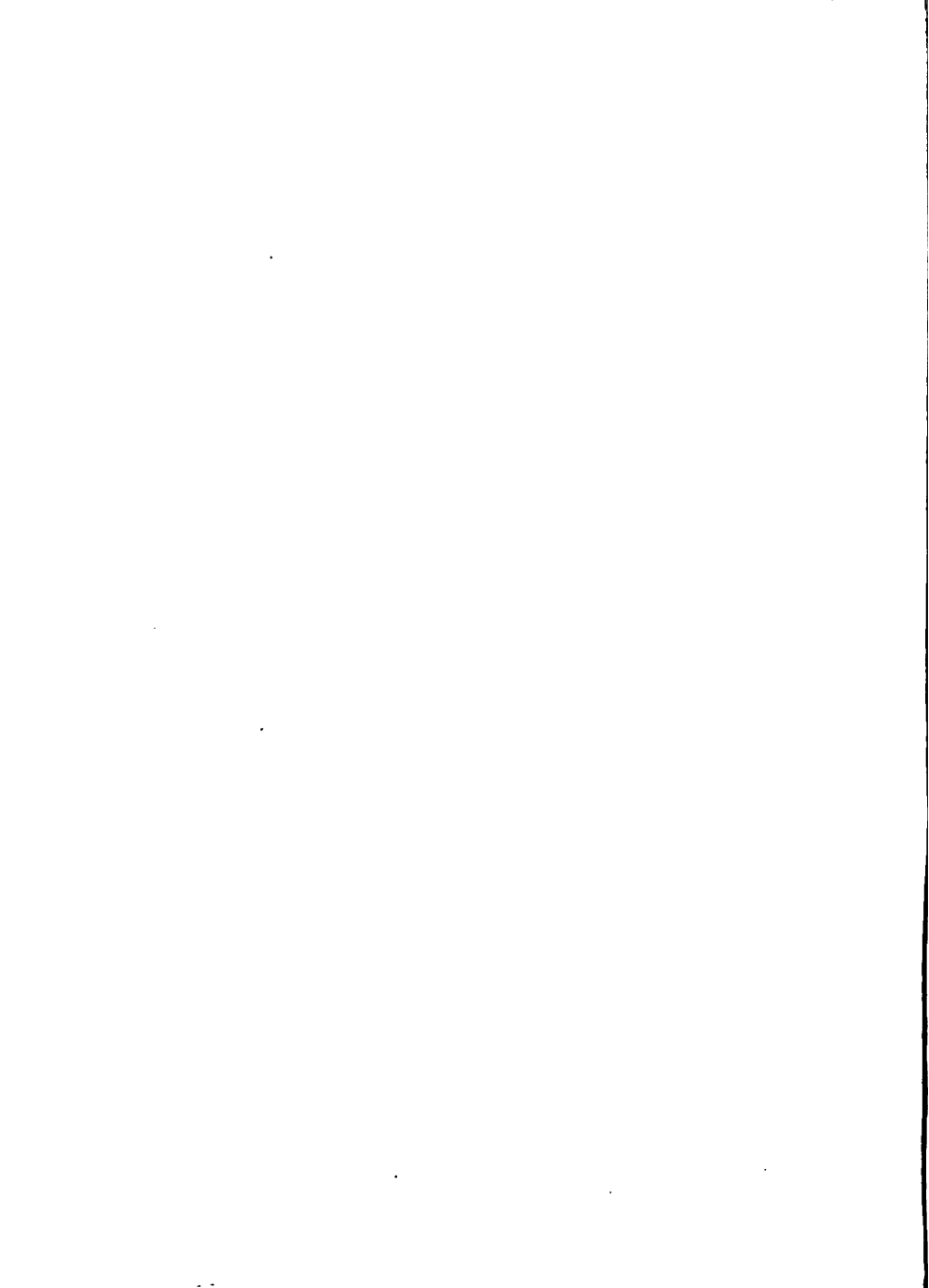
Bought from the Fund for
CURRENT MODERN POETRY
given by

MORRIS GRAY

CLASS OF 1877







MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

JAQUES : More ! I prithee, more.

AMIENS : My voice is ragged ; I know I cannot
please you.

JAQUES : I do not desire you to please me ; I do
desire you to sing.

As You Like It.

MYTHS ABOUT
MONARCHS

BY HANSARD WATT

AUTHOR OF "HOME-MADE HISTORY" / /



LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH

1907

23493.18.14.100

v

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

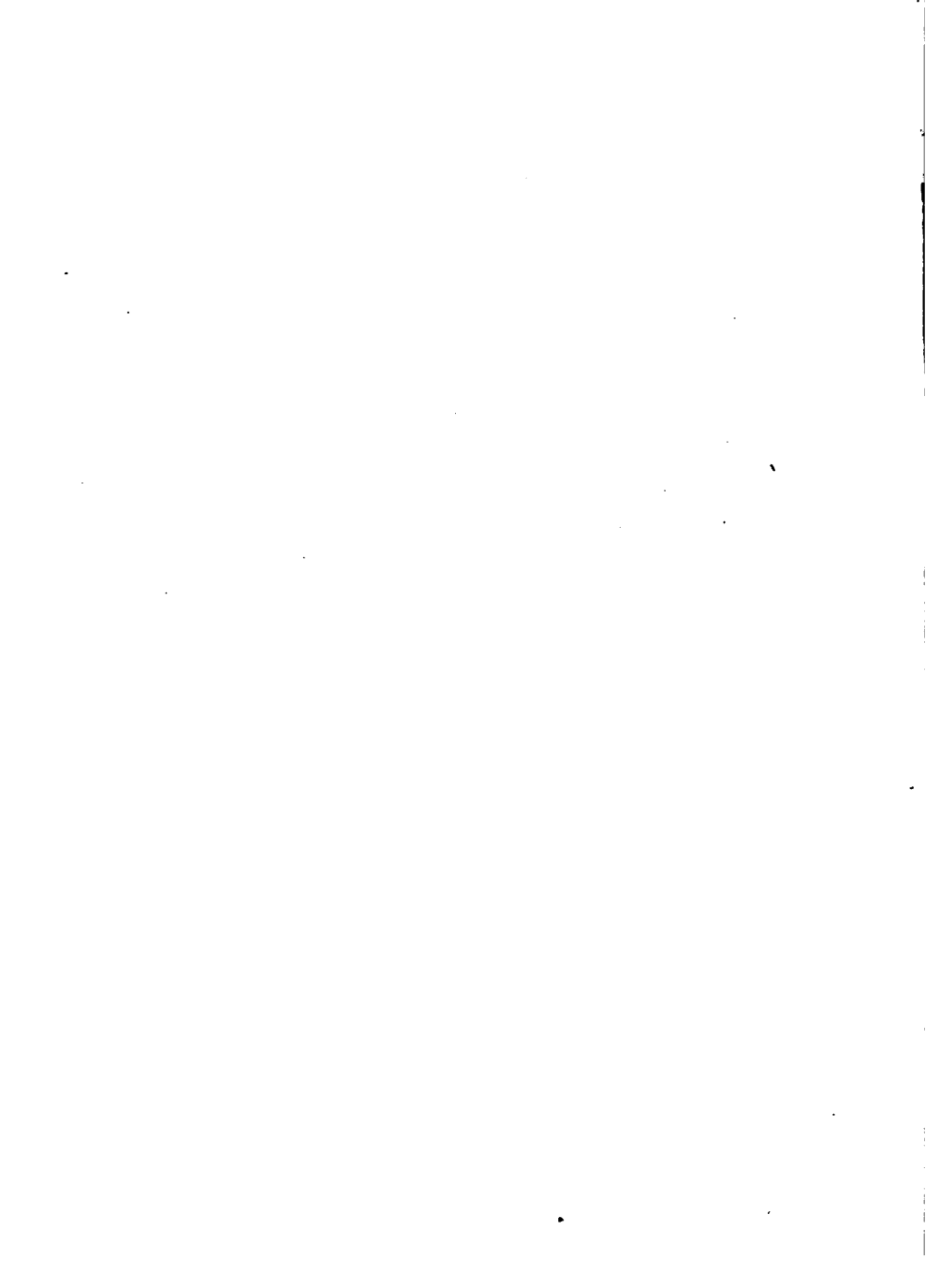
MORRIS GRAY FUND

Feb. 14, 1933

T

NOTE

For permission to reprint these verses
I have to thank the Editors of *The
Westminster Gazette*, *The Novel Maga-
sine*, *The Grand Magasine*, *The London
Magasine*, and *Cassell's Magasine*.
"Polycrates" is published here for the
first time.



TO
J. W. G.
AND
E. W. D.

PREFACE

There may be some who, if constrained to look
Within the covers of this little book,
Shall, seeing verses, shut it with a snap,
And, flinging it aside, remark, "Poor chap!"
"Why is it people waste their time," they say,
"In this abysmal, idiotic way?
If they have any worthy tale to tell,
How A. or B. set forth, and what befell,
How this one play'd his little part in life,
Or that one woo'd a not unwilling wife,
Why not proclaim their puppets' joys or woes
In sober and unsentimental prose?"

Such people think, and doubtless they are right,
That minor poets should be shot at sight;
But are they, when they advocate these views,
Aware how many trifle with the Muse?

PREFACE

A few there be who, now and then, by dint
Of perseverance win their way to print ;
But then for each so chosen there must be
Ten thousand scribbling in obscurity !
Vain, therefore, to destroy the printed few—
So incomplete a cure would never do ;
The ranks, diminished only for a time,
Would fill again with champions of rhyme,
Who with their latest and expiring breath
Would hail with song their swift approaching
death !

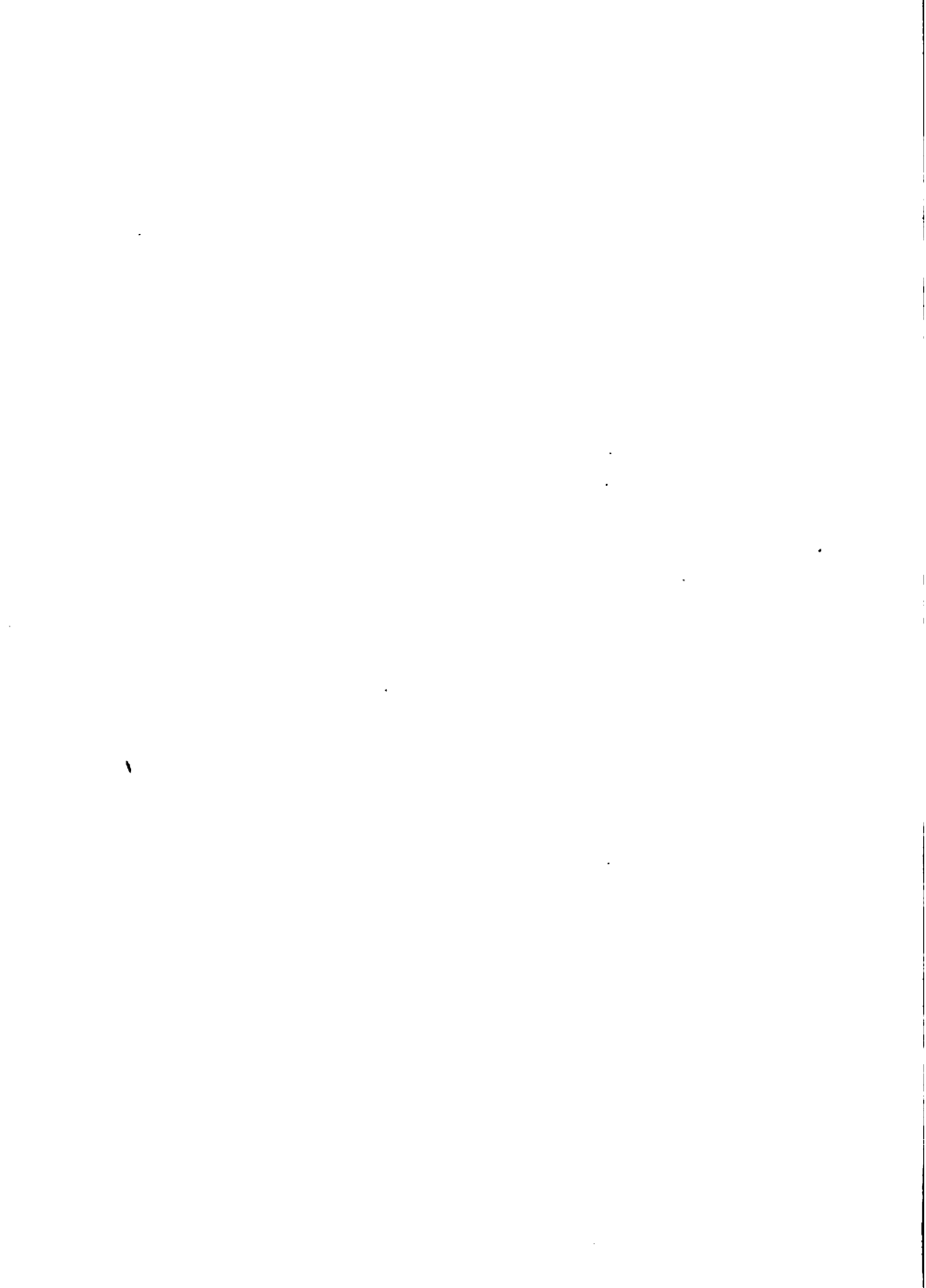
There is no cure. We bards can never die :
What none demand we ever must supply ;
Our careful couplets we will fondly link
So long as there are fountain pens and ink ;
Unceasing we pursue our fancies' flight,
Collect what little thoughts we have—and write,
And with sublime indiff'rence never heed
The fact that none (save our relations) read !

What saith the adage ? That must be endured
Which can by no expedient be cured !

CONTENTS

	Page
A Day in the Life of Pharaoh	15
Busiris	23
Rhamsinitus	29
Cyrus	43
Necho	49
Cræsus	55
Cambyses	61
Polycrates	67
Darius	79
The Sacred Chickens	85
To the Critic	91

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
PHARAOH**



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PHARAOH

And what did chaps like Pharaoh do?
A child I once was talking to
Inopportunately asked ;
And luckily enough for me
There was no adult near to see
My ignorance unmasked.

I never think it wise to show
That there are things I do not know
When speaking to the young,
And so I tried to feel at ease
While wayward guesses such as these
Slipped glibly from my tongue.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

You ask how Pharaoh spent his days,
In what variety of ways

His time was occupied ?

Then listen : He arose at nine,
And, if it chanced the day were fine,
He breakfasted outside.

Though richly bless'd with worldly goods,
No patent pre-digested foods.

Were to his table borne ;
Content with what was close at hand,
He broke his fast, I understand,
Exclusively on corn.

From Joseph, as you may have read,
The country had inherited

A plentiful supply,
And "Corn in Egypt," thanks to him,
Has since become a synonym
For wealth and luxury.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

This labour done, his next would be
To view the spacious Factory,
Wherein with joy he saw
In each dim cell some five or six
Unhappy Hebrews making bricks
With insufficient straw.

Two pleasant hours would thus be spent
With every symptom of content,
So gladsome was the sight ;
And as his homeward way he took,
The oft-repeated backward look
Betokened his delight.

Till lunch-time he would then repose,
Stretched out upon the roof, and doze
Or watch the placid Nile,
In safety contemplating thus
The cheerful hippopotamus
And crafty crocodile.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

And if the sun with scorching ray
Smote heavy on him as he lay,
Obedient to his glance
Two trembling slaves on either hand
Enthusiastically fanned
His heated countenance.

His lunch was scant and over soon ;
His programme for the afternoon
Would always be the same ;
The hours succeeding his repast
Were sacred to that everlast-
ing Royal and Antient game !

This statement is on knowledge based,
For golf in every age is traced
By sure connecting links,
And ancient tablets I have seen,
Show Cheops " On the seventh green,"
Or " Bunkered by the Sphinx ! "

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Two rounds, and then he would forsake
His cleek, and with reluctance make
 Another kind of tea ;
Whereafter pressing State affairs
Would plunge him in a sea of cares
 And dull despondency.

Precisely on the stroke of nine
He set aside his work to dine,
 Of melancholy rid ;
And Hebrew authors oft repeat
These simple words : " The King *did* eat,"
 With accent on the " did."

A game of draughts might then begin
With some one who forebore to win
 At peril of his head,
And such I deem a sample day
Which well entitled him to say,
 Like Pepys : " And so to bed !"

BUSIRIS

BUSIRIS

When King Busiris made a joke,
 However puerile or crude,
His wit was certain to evoke
 The plaudits of the multitude.
(For any one who failed to laugh
Was generally torn in half.)

It has been proved beyond a doubt,
 As certain ancient records tell,
That in his day a dismal drought
 Upon the land of Egypt fell.
Nine weary years were spent in vain
Entreaty for a shower of rain !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

The Nile, beneath a torrid sky,
A simple streamlet had become ;
The monarch's wit itself ran dry,
And jokes were at a premium.
The few he ventured on might not
Inaptly be described "dry rot" !

A famine followed, for the land
Refused its wonted crops to bear ;
The common people fed on sand,
The King had little better fare.
He lived on butter sparsely spread
On crusts of Aerated Bread !

It happened that one afternoon
A certain stranger passing by
Was heard to say that he could soon
The needed remedy supply.
"Conduct me to the King," quoth he,
"If food and water you would see."

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Oh, what a tumult then was heard !
They bore him breathless to the throne ;
Their future hung upon the word
Of this deliverer unknown.
So great a silence fell on all
That men distinctly heard it fall !

"O King," he said, "most mighty lord,
Thy troubles soon may have an end,
Speak but the necessary word,
And rain in plenty shall descend.
Scorn not a sage's sound advice
But make a *human sacrifice* !"

"So let it be," the King replied ;
"My people shall no longer thirst,
Since you such counsel have supplied
You surely shall be offered *first* !
So may you win an honoured name
And merit everlasting fame !"

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

If any word the victim spoke
It fell unheeded in the cheers
Which heralded the only joke
The King had made for seven years !
And, later, they renewed their mirth
When rain refreshed the weary earth.

RHAMSINITUS

RHAMSINITUS

**Let us sing of Rhamsinitus,
Ancient Egypt's miser king,
For his story will delight us
(Which is mainly why we sing) :
Know that he amassed a treasure
Greater far than he could count,
Nor could any process measure
The amount.**

**So he built a Safe Deposit
For the storing of his gold,
Of gigantic size (because it
Had such quantities to hold).**

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Strong it seemed past all believing ;
No one could deceit expect,
Saving only the deceiving
Architect.

He, a man supremely gifted
With the wisdom of his race,
Knew a stone which could be shifted
From a certain vital place.
Which contrivance, I may mention,
As was later clearly shown,
Was a criminal invention
Of his own.

Often would this schemer cunning
Thither wend his guilty flight,
Seven times a week go running
In the watches of the night !
And when there his person artful
Through the aperture would squeeze,
Gold abstracting by the cartful
At his ease.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Thus in course of time acquiring
Riches scaling many tons,
He, when finally expiring,
Left the secret to his sons,
Who, continuing to profit
By the monarch's boundless store,
Made a handsome living off it
As before.

This went on until the practice
Dawned upon the greedy King,
Who (the melancholy fact is)
Swore at once like anything !
Flew into a purple passion
Born of impotent despair,
And, as was the current fashion,
Tore his hair.

Seven weeks he sat in ashes
With a look which seemed to say :
" Tell me where my stolen cash is—
Who has taken it away ? "

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Scores of overpaid magicians
Followed every kind of clue,
But, though many their suspicions,
Facts were few !

Roused at last from his inaction,
Rhamsinitus racked his brain,
Till a gleam of satisfaction
Overspread his face again :
He would be his own detective,
And the robbers' cunning meet
With a plan at once effective
And complete.

Furnished with a goodly number
Of the strongest kind of gins,
Calculated to encumber
An intruding stranger's shins,
He established them in places
Where the treasure-chamber bore
Faint incriminating traces
On its floor !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Came the brothers unsuspecting,
When the pall of night was spread,
With the object of collecting
Fresh supplies of daily bread.
In they clambered, softly lighting
On the flagstones underneath,
Just escaping the inviting
Rows of teeth.

In the darkness deftly groping
Soon the younger filled his sack,
And was stealthily eloping
With his burden on his back,
When, by some mischance or other,
An inevitable trap
Suddenly engulfed his brother
With a snap !

Not a groan escaped the victim,
Not a single angry word
'Gainst the man who had thus tricked him
In the silence could be heard.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

"Shame and death," he said, "await me,
For the evil I have done ;
Draw your sword—decapitate me—
And begone.

"When they come, these plotters clever,
And a headless captive view,
They will be as far as ever
From obtaining any clue.
Therefore leave my body where it
Well may fill them with dismay,
But remove my head and bear it
Far away."

This his brother did, admitting
That the stratagem was wise,
Tears of sorrow, as was fitting,
Streaming from his downcast eyes.
Then into the night emerging
Home he took his way again,
Schemes for retribution surging
In his brain.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Certain he was now in sight of
A significant success,
Rhamsinitus passed a night of
Quite unwonted wakefulness.
Wherefore it is not surprising,
Lacking as he did repose,
That what time the sun was rising
He, too, rose.

With his mind on vengeance centred,
To his treasure-house he sped,
Opened wide the door and entered,
Staggered back discomfited !
And he surely must be pitied
In his overwhelming grief,
He, a king, to be outwitted
By a thief !

Home he fled as one who dashes
To a dentist when in pain,
Ordered fresh supplies of ashes,
Rent his raven locks again.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Which supreme humiliation
Bred ere many hours had passed
Just as good an inspiration
As the last.

"Doubtless," so he argued, "dozens
Of his relatives will come,
Uncles, aunts, and second cousins,
Some alone—in parties some :
And if these shall see him lying
In his present parlous state,
They will not refrain from sighing
At his fate."

So he hung the mutilated
Body to the outer wall,
Adequately elevated
Where it could be seen by all.
Kept by trusted guards and daring,
With instructions to arrest
Any passer-by whose bearing
Seemed depressed !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Lo ! an aged merchant passes,
Driving in a single line
Seven heavy-laden asses
Bearing skins of ruby wine !
Suddenly a mighty rushing
Rouses him as from a dream
Out the wine pours in a gushing,
Crimson stream !

Which phenomenon perceiving,
Every guard forsook his post,
One and all their duty leaving
Joined each other in a toast.
Ripping open every skinful
To the owner's deep distress,
Till they lay in senseless, sinful
Drunkenness !

But the merchant, showing traces
Of a strange, ecstatic glee,
Shaved one side of all their faces
With supreme dexterity !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Not a single right-hand whisker
That escaped his razor keen :
Never, surely, was a brisker
Barber seen !

Next with fitting care he laid them
Heel to head and side by side,
Murmuring, as he survey'd them
With a pardonable pride,
"Fast asleep you lie, yet faster
Shall your slumber be, I fear,
When that cunning king, your master,
Finds you here !"

Then the thief (he was none other
Than our treasure-seeking friend)
Cut the cords which bound his brother,
Caused his body to descend.
Very skilfully he caught it
Ere it fell upon the ground,
And in triumph homeward brought it
Safe and sound !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

When this sorry situation
He had leisure to digest,
Rage succumbed to admiration
In the monarch's manly breast.
Pardon to the thief he tendered
Per the *Memphis Weekly Times*,
And forgot the loss engendered
By his crimes.

So the robber made confession,
Telling everything he knew,
Being under the impression
It would pay him so to do.
Whereupon he was rewarded
With a fair princess's hand,
And exalted rank accorded
In the land.

Covered thus with gilded glory
We will bid him fond farewell ;
Trusting only that the story
We have humbly tried to tell

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

May be found a source of pleasure
And a satisfaction bring
More enduring than the treasure
Of the King!

CYRUS

CYRUS

No man of learning will dispute
What History has handed down,
That Cyrus loved his silver flute
More dearly than his golden crown.
When not engaged in State affairs
He played the most entrancing airs.

And once while strolling by the sea
There came to him the sudden wish
To test his great ability
Upon the unoffending fish.
He thought it probable that they
Would come ashore to hear him play.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

He piped his most seductive strain,
And swept the sea with eager glance,
Piped all the tunes he knew, in vain !
The fish were not inclined to dance.
In deep disgust the monarch rose
And brought his concert to a close.

A week elapsed, and back he went,
Still harbouring intense regret,
And lo ! two fishermen, intent
On taking herring from a net ;
They whistled merrily the while
Their hours of labour to beguile.

The monarch looked and rubbed his eyes,
Such wonder did the sight afford,
For with unparalleled surprise
He saw the fish with one accord
Leaping and dancing on the sand
(As fishes do when brought to land).

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

"Ho ! ho !" he cried, "these wretched slaves
Need whistle but a bar or two,
And fish by hundreds leave the waves
Which for myself they would not do.
Now by the throne which I adorn
'Twere better they had not been born !"

Then swiftly from his robe he took
His silver flute and struck an air,
The fishermen turned round to look,
And trembled, seeing who was there.
And then they heard his mandate ring :
"Dance, villains !" roared the angry King.

And dance they did with main and might,
Revolving, leaping to and fro,
Hour after hour till fall of night
They tripped the light fantastic toe.
Nor was it till they fainting fell
That Cyrus cried : "Enough ! 'Tis well."

NECHO

D

NECHO

Six days did Necho, King of Egypt, think,
Refusing either nourishment or drink ;
Then, having thoroughly matured his plans,
Commanded : " Bring me some Phœnicians ! "

To whom : " Good Mariners," the monarch said,
" Unending glory shall on you be shed,
If round this Libya you make a trip,
And circumnavigate it in a ship."

" Great Pharaoh," they made answer, " we obey,
Nor do thy servants feel the least dismay."
Then, eager for the quest, they hoisted sail,
South-wafted by a favourable gale.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Their progress for a time was passing good,
Yet as the months went by their stock of food
Grew daily, to their infinite distress,
"Fine by degrees, and beautifully less!"

Perceiving which they were constrained to land,
Against their will, on Afric's barren strand;
Much seed they scattered, nor set sail again
Until they gathered in the golden grain.

Three years they journey'd, and thrice reaped
their corn,
Yet were their easy tempers little worn;
Southward they sailed, then westward with the
sun,
Then north and east and lo! their task was
done.

King Necho met them in the homeward reach,
And gave them greeting as they press'd the
beach,
Plied them with eager questioning if they
Had witnessed any wonder by the way?

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

"O King," they cried, "in wisdom unexcell'd,
One great and solemn wonder we beheld ;
For in a distant corner of this land
Thy servants saw *the sun on their right hand !*"

"Impossible," the King replied ; "you rave,
Good sailors though you be and passing brave."
Whereat th' intrepid mariners bent low,
Yet still persisted : "It was even so !"

"Some vices," said the King, "may have their
cure,
But boasting liars I will not endure ;
Let these," he ordered, "instantly be slain,
Lest haply they should live to lie again !"

CRÆSUS

CROESUS

Now Croesus was the kind of King
Who took the greatest care,
When he was doing anything,
No matter what or where,
To see that he was more or less
Assured of ultimate success.

Pre-eminently this was so
Ere he to battle went,
He took the greatest pains to know
The probable event :
Consulting oracles to see
If they could promise victory.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

And very early in his reign
He organised a test,
By which he hoped to ascertain
What oracle was best.
Some twenty shrines there may have been,
And competition thus was keen.

Selecting, therefore, twenty men,
He sent a man to each ;
He told them what to say, and when
To make their little speech.
"At noon on Saturday !" he cried,
"Ask how the King is occupied !"

The day arrived, the monarch sought
An underground retreat ;
"No one can see me here," he thought,
"My ambush is complete."
And then he set himself to do
The most unlikely thing he knew.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

A young and tender lamb he got,
And boiled it, wool and all ;
Inserting, as he stirred the pot,
One tortoise, cut up small.
" The one that fathoms this," cried he,
" Shall be the oracle for me !"

The messengers returned and made
Each man his own reply ;
Yet only one of them display'd
The least sagacity.
At Delphi, to the King's delight,
The local Zancig answered right !

You may (and doubtless will) believe
This tale to be untrue ;
I shall not personally grieve
If you adopt that view.
Indeed, I hasten to express
My own complete distrustfulness !

CAMBYSES

CAMBYSES

Cambyses, one of Persia's kings,
 Resembled Nero in his ways,
Rejoicing much in torturings
 And murders on alternate days.
Supreme delight he could derive
From prisoners interr'd alive !

Yet no one ventured to protest
 Or grumble at the monarch's fun,
The populace kept silence, lest
 By speaking they should be undone,
Till Croesus to remonstrate came
And boldly dared to cry "For shame !"

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

"Preach not to me," Cambyses said ;
 "Your words convince me not at all."
The nimble Croesus ducked his head—
 The arrow quivered in the wall ;
And ere another could be sent
The human target rose and went.

And yet, though something fleet of limb,
 Not long protracted was the chase,
Swift messengers surrounded him
 And clasped him in a tight embrace.
It was, they said, Cambyses' will
That, having captured, they should kill !

But if, they argued, morning came
 And brought repentance to their lord,
Instead of meriting his blame
 They might receive a rich reward
If they their captive could display
As sound as when he ran away.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

And even so it came to pass,
 Cambyses mourned his hasty act,
He rent his garments till, alas !
 No single thread remained intact.
(A habit which the Persians had
Whenever they were feeling sad.)

Great therefore was his joy to find
 His regal guest alive and well,
Delight and gratitude combined
 His former sorrow to expel ;
Yet on his servants standing by
He cast but a revengeful eye.

Nor had they leisure long to quake,
 For, with their feet securely bound,
Within the ornamental lake
 He had them severally drowned.
Thus proving how unwise a thing
 It was to disobey the King !

POLYCRATES

POLYCRATES

When long ago the world was young,
And Golf and Vanguards were unknown,
When Ancient Britons ranked among
The products of an Age of stone,
There dwelt awhile in Samos' Isle
A King who wore a chronic smile !

Polycrates, of whom I sing,
The hero of this ancient myth,
Had doubtless been as good a King
If he had borne the name of Smith ;
As Jones or Brown, his gilded crown
Would have secured him like renown.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

But I digress. This worthy man
Was prosperous in all he did,
His bank account was vaster than
The vastest kind of pyramid.
He simply rolled in wealth untold
And wallowed in excess of gold !

Now Amasis of Egypt viewed
Success so uniformly great
With such extreme disquietude
As made him grow disconsolate.
His appetite was put to flight
And sleepless was his couch at night !

But seeing that they were allied
He planned and plotted night and day
To stem the force of Fortune's tide,
Or make it flow some other way.
Luck so unending must portend
(He argued) an abysmal end.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

And so one day, while in the thick
Of onerous affairs of State,
Polycrates received a brick
Presented on a golden plate.
"A letter!" he remarked, "for me ;
From whom, I wonder, can it be?"

A letter? Yes, for be it known
That in that dim and distant day
Men wrote with chisels upon stone
And sculptured all they had to say.
The skilful dint on polished flint
Was more enduring far than print.

The library was not the spot
For those who liked to choose and pick,
Since novels of the time were not
Unlike so many tons of brick.
The very few there were on view
Gave readers quite enough to do.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

But to resume. Polycrates
Perused his letter to the end ;
The pictures did not seem to please,
But manifestly to offend.
Herodotus has given us
A somewhat free translation—thus :

*"Polycrates, if tales are true
Concerning all that you possess,
I needs must take a dismal view
Of such extravagant success.
For wealth so vast and made so fast
Must bring catastrophe at last !*

*"A remedy I would suggest,
A simple if a painful plan :
Select what thing you value best
And lose it, where the hand of man
Can never more its form restore
However deeply it explore.*

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

*"And if my friendship you would keep,
Fear not to make this timely stitch,
That so you may not live to reap
The fruits of that good fortune which
I frankly thirst to see reversed—
Yours truly, AMASIS I."*

Although inclined to take offence,
Polycrates could not deny
That counsel from a man of sense
Should be obeyed implicitly.
The danger might perhaps be slight,
But what if Amasis were right !

Persuaded, then, the plan was sound
As coming from a friendly King,
He searched his collar-drawer and found
A large and lustrous ruby ring.
Then mournfully he put to sea,
As ill at ease as he could be.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

The gem was sunk ten fathoms deep,
And disappeared from mortal gaze.
The King refused to eat or sleep
For seventeen successive days.
Nor bite nor sup nor foaming cup
Had any power to cheer him up.

And now a knocking grim and great,
Delivered by no trembling hand,
Was heard upon the palace gate
(The tradesman's entrance, understand).
A man was there whose frenzied air
Betokened some occurrence rare.

A fisherman he was by trade
Who now exhibiting his prize
Before the astonished cook displayed
A turbot of gigantic size ;
A fish whose weight I hesitate
To guess or even estimate.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

"Though poor," he said, "I gladly bring
The fruit of this my record cast,
That haply it may tempt the King
To break his long-protracted fast."
Which said, he went away content
With pence and much advertisement.

The cook, assisted by his wife
Whose aid he had petitioned for,
Attacked the turbot with his knife,
And lo ! in its interior—
(Words scarce convey what I would say)
The monarch's ring uninjured lay !

And then and there and as he was
That cook ran headlong to the King,
Exceeding jubilant because
He was the finder of the ring.
He deemed his lord would well reward
The man who had his gem restored !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

The monarch gave a startled cry,
And then his face grew still more sad ;
He sooner would have said good-bye
To every other ring he had
Than bear the pain and mental strain
Of seeing this one back again.

"Alas !" he cried, "who can deny
That mine is but a sorry state ?
One cannot alter Destiny
Or wage a winning war with Fate !
And it were vain to strive again
Or open up a new campaign."

Though I of course could tell you how
Polycrates was doomed to die,
Such details matter little now
And make but dismal history.
Enough to say that from that day
He view'd the future with dismay !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

Not so the fisherman who sold
The turbot to the palace cook.
Above his shop some words of gold,
Well seen by all who cared to look,
Announced that he henceforth would be
"PURVEYOR TO HIS MAJESTY !"

DARIUS

DARIUS

The curious with one accord
Made haste to throng the public square,
For King Darius, Persia's lord,
Was holding Quarter Sessions there.
He had before him at the time
(By various accusers led)
A certain man, to whom the crime
Of murder was attributed.

Darius, having heard them all,
Both prosecution and defence,
Condemned the luckless criminal
On circumstantial evidence.

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

And since a trifling sprain debarr'd
Himself from walking much about,
He sent the Captain of his Guard
To see the sentence carried out.

Now, as they neared the place of death
They saw one running from afar,
Begrin'd with dust and scant of breath,
Yet generally jocular.
"I am the murdered man," he cried,
"And ample evidence can bring
To prove that I have never died—
Come back and let us tell the King!"

So back they gladly went and gained
A further hearing of the case ;
The Captain of the Guard explained
Precisely what had taken place.
Yet all his fine forensic skill
No pity in the King awoke,
Who, rising, bade the Court be still
And thus his final judgment spoke :

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

"Oh, Persians, hearken unto me
And hear how justice shall be done :
Three executions shall you see
In place of your expected one.
The prisoner must surely die,
Because a Persian monarch's word,
Once pledged, can not be altered by
Events which may have since occur'd.

"The man-at-arms who disobeys
Instructions definite and clear,
The price of such rebellion pays
By terminating his career !
Let, then, this Captain of the Guard
Henceforth be numbered with the dead,
Nor can we deem the sentence hard
Which parts his body from his head !"

Then last the man reported slain
Was sent to join the other two ;
"Your crime," the King observed, "is plain—
These people owe their deaths to you !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

For had you never lived," he cried,
"This hapless pair had now been free,
This case would never have been tried
Nor soiled the page of History!"

THE SACRED CHICKENS

THE SACRED CHICKENS

Before a Roman risked a fight
 With any foreign naval foe,
He deemed it prudent to invite
 The aid of Neptune, Mars and Co. ;
And as the Gods approved or banned
He put to sea or stayed on land.]

Attached to every Roman fleet
 Were Chickens, sacred from their birth,
And victory or dire defeat
 (With corresponding gloom or mirth)
Depended only on the mood
In which the Chickens faced their food !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

For if with normal appetite
They fell upon each fresh supply,
The omens were considered bright
And indicated victory.
But if the fowls refused to eat,
A battle simply meant defeat !

The story I shall now relate
Concerns a certain Consul who,
Though seemingly unfortunate,
If all we hear of him is true,
Was none the less a man of grit
And furnished with a ready wit.

"To-night," he said, "we will surprise
The Carthage fleet in yonder bay"—
The Roman navy rubbed its eyes
In wonder mingled with dismay.
The night was dark, their ships were few,
And numbered less than one to two !

MYTHS ABOUT MONARCHS

And while with soft persuasive word
They sought to set his plan aside,
The Chicken-Keeper's voice was heard,
That voice which could not be denied :
"O Consul, do not court defeat,
The Sacred Chickens will not eat !"

Mere words could not ambition quell,
Nor omens make that Consul shrink ;
"They will not eat, you say. 'Tis well,
Then let the stupid creatures drink ;"
And, laughing with a fiendish glee,
He hurled them all into the sea !

The Chickens sank. The briny wave
For ever stemmed their appetite ;
The sporting Consul shared their grave
A little later in the night.
And Carthage sent the message home—
"Sensational defeat of Rome !"

TO THE CRITIC

TO THE CRITIC

My task is done, and I have but to learn
Your verdict and my own uncertain fate ;
Then, gentle critic, do not hesitate
Th' expectant poet's gratitude to earn.
Does not your kindly heart within you burn
To prove to me your wisdom, while I wait
With breathless eagerness to hear you state
What little excellence you may discern ?

Give, then, your verdict ; tell me here and now
If it be good or ill, abuse or praise :
To your impartial ruling I must bow,
And needs must weep if you condemn my lays.
Shall sombre sackcloth press my pensive brow,
Or verdant and imperishable bays ?

Printed by BALLANTYNE & Co. LIMITED
Tavistock Street, London

